

If there's one word that intimidates men, the word is "rape." Many of us have felt that the "R-word" grants a fearsome power to women, a verbal sword with which they can cut down men's social status, wreck our lives, and devastate us legally and financially—all with a calculated accusation. The irony is that rape, which unlike all other forms of assault is singularly masculine in its perpetration, is an act of violent robbery of *women's* power and control.

In my work as a rape educator in central Oklahoma, I've found that many young males find the topic of rape to be a minefield; the theory goes like this: "Any woman who wants revenge, attention, or power over a guy can use the 'rape' allegation to get us." And almost without fail, another young man in the room will offer the same anecdotal proof: "just look at Kobe Bryant."

It's apparent that the Kobe Bryant case has become a social dartboard, pin-holed by deep-seated beliefs, myths and speculations about what rape is (or isn't), hurled verbally with more conviction than accuracy. Regardless of which side of the case people believe—and I won't take a position here, myself—the Kobe case has changed the very way in which we discuss rape, power, and victimization.

But we could find much value in identifying ways in which the Kobe case is *not* typical: American citizens report a rape about 80 times per hour, and yet rape is the most under-reported crime in America. We could ask ourselves, "What social realities keep 90% (by the FBI's estimate) of victims silent?" More than 1,500 women a year in my state of Oklahoma endure the painful forensic examinations after a sexual assault, and most will never see their cases prosecuted. Nearly 680,000 women per year in America will be the victims of rape or attempted rape, with the highest-risk group being young people age 13-25.

In my work experiences with rape victims, the first paralyzing fear that most had after their experience was "My God, *nobody* will believe me!" Too often, her fear is accurate. The (false) belief that accusations are made to extort money or to seek sympathy crumble quickly under the realization that rape trials do *not* result in jackpot financial rewards for the survivor, and that the attention tends to be negative, gossip-laden, and poisoned by cruel assumptions about rape: "she asked for it; she put herself in that position; she's lying; she has a reputation..." (again, the Kobe case offers teachable examples). Typically, the result is that making a rape allegation diminishes a woman's social status and power, and does not enhance it. So much for the "accusation-as-a-weapon" theory.

What should be done, then, is that men—real, strong, dependable, patient men—must create the social conditions in which it becomes as safe as possible for women to disclose their experiences and their need for help. Only when women see us remaining dignified, nonviolent, and willing to overcome our own ignorance with a fearless and deliberate search for facts about sexual assault, will women really entrust us as allies in their recovery.

Of women who do report rape, half turn to a male as the first person from whom she seeks trust, help, or advice. And nothing makes men feel better than when a woman depends on us and we are actually confident and effective. But until then, women are watching us. They are weighing every comment and assumption we make about other raped women to test whether we are truly able to function as allies.

It's time for men to be real men—real fathers, real boyfriends, real brothers, real partners—and re-learn the ways in which we talk and think about rape. For survivors of the fastest-growing violent crime in America, the need could be no less urgent.

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